Environmental Assessment

NV-042-02-032

Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Ely Field Office

Prepared by: Mark Lowrie, Range Specialist
January 12, 2006

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

This environmental assessment (EA) addresses the impacts to public land resources from a proposal to implement the Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development, a water resource range improvement. This EA fulfills the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement for a site-specific analysis. This EA is tiered to and incorporates by reference the Programmatic Pipeline and Spring Development Environmental Assessment EA-NV-040-5-29 (April, 1986). The programmatic EA is available for review in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely Field Office.

Need for the Proposal

The need for the proposal is to improve the rangeland health and watershed condition for the beneficial use of livestock, wildlife, and wild horses. A need to improve the native plant communities of both the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Grazing Allotments has been identified following thirteen years of rangeland monitoring data gathered for these areas. Cattle and wild horses have traditionally concentrated on the winterfat range sites in the Green Springs Valley bottom. Improved distribution of grazing use is needed. The project proposal would shift some grazing use from the winterfat bottoms to the sagebrush range sites on the benches up off the valley bottoms.

Duckwater Cattle Company (Alan & Edna Forsgren) is the sole permittee authorized to graze the Monte Cristo Allotment (0614) and the Green Springs Use Area of the Duckwater Allotment (0701). The pipeline would be constructed in both allotments. BLM and Duckwater Cattle Company signed a grazing agreement in August 1999 whereby Duckwater Cattle Company agreed to take voluntary non-use of 400 of 1,129 AUMs permitted cattle grazing in the Monte Cristo Allotment. In return, BLM agreed to work with Duckwater Cattle Co. on several range improvements in the allotment, including the Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development. The agreement was called *Stipulation for Dismissal of Appeals* (NV-04-95-07 and NV-04-95-08). Duckwater Cattle Co. also agreed with BLM in 1996 to accept a reduction to the grazing permit in the Green Springs Use Area of the Duckwater Allotment and is currently required to haul water to this area to distribute livestock grazing.

Relationship to Planning

The project would be in conformance with the Proposed Egan Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/FEIS), dated December 24, 1983 and Egan Resource Area Record of Decision (ROD) signed February 3, 1987. The ROD states in part on page 3, "…develop and implement range improvements which emphasize greatest return on investment in relationship to resource needs…" The implementation of rangeland improvement projects is listed as a long-term selected management action (5-20 years) on page 20 of the RMP/FEIS.

The project is also consistent with the White Pine County Land Use Plan of May, 1998 which

states the following:

- "The federal government should continue to make the public rangelands economically and realistically available for livestock grazing, along with the other multiple use objectives." (page 7)
- "Range improvements should be encouraged where appropriate incentive programs and participating financing should be provided." (page 7)

The water pipeline proposal would contribute to achieving the Northeastern Great Basin Area Resource Advisory Council Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration and Healthy Rangelands. Standards and Guidelines for grazing administration were developed by the Northeastern Great Basin Area Resource Advisory Council, and approved by the Secretary of the Interior on February 12, 1997. Page one of the document states that "Standards and Guidelines will be implemented through terms and conditions of grazing permits, leases, and other authorizations, grazing – related portions of activity plans, and through range improvement related activities."

Issues

No issues were identified during the internal scoping process with regard to the proposed action.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct approximately two miles of water pipeline in generally a north/south direction through the southeast portion of Newark Valley south of Highway 50. The pipeline would be constructed in both the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Allotments (See Map A).

The pipeline would begin on BLM public lands in the Monte Cristo Allotment at the existing water well, storage tank, and troughs located in T. 16N., R. 57E., Section 18, NE ¼ of the SW ¼. The pipeline would bear southerly somewhat parallel to the southeast boundary fence of the Monte Cristo Seeding through sections 18, 19, and 30. The pipeline would stop in the Duckwater Allotment in T. 16N., R. 57E., Section 30, SW ¼ of the SW ¼. The pipeline would supply two troughs. Bird ladders would be placed in each trough as escape ramps for wildlife. A small overflow pond would be dug at each trough site to capture excess flow and enhance water availability. Each pond would measure approximately 12 feet across and approximately 4 feet deep.

The legal locations of the two troughs would be as follows:

Trough #1 (Monte Cristo Allotment) T. 16N., R. 57E., Section 19, NE ¼ of the NW ¼.
Trough #2 (Duckwater Allotment) T. 16N., R. 57E., Section 30, SW ¼ of the SW ¼.

The pipeline would run primarily through pinyon-juniper/Wyoming sagebrush/perennial grass native range. It would also run through black sagebrush/perennial grass native range in the

Duckwater Allotment. The pipeline would be laid to meet BLM specifications and standards. The 1.5 inch polyvinyl chloride (pvc) pipe would be laid at a depth of approximately 18 inches with a ripper mounted on a bulldozer. This would be a buried pipeline, to protect it from adverse weather and from trampling by livestock, wild horses, or wildlife. A backhoe would be used for installation of the troughs.

The authorized permittee would provide the troughs, attachments and valves, and labor to clear juniper and pinyon trees. The permittee would install the troughs. The authorized permittee would assume maintenance responsibility for the project through a cooperative agreement. The Ely BLM would provide and install the pipeline. Construction work on the pipeline would commence during the summer of 2006 or 2007 and would take from two to four weeks. Construction methods are fully described in the Proposed Action portion of the Programmatic Pipeline EA. Cross country travel by vehicles and construction equipment would be permitted along the pipeline route during construction and for maintenance. Chain saws would be used to clear trees and brush for the pipeline corridor.

It is not expected that the pipeline would be constructed during the migratory bird nesting period, from May 1 to July 15. If the pipeline is constructed during that period, a survey of the route would be completed prior to construction by the Ely Field Office wildlife biologist in order to comply with the requirements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

BLM would supervise and monitor construction of the pipeline to insure specifications and standard operating procedures (SOP's) are followed, particularly those requirements that would minimize impacts to the vegetative resource. SOP's for this proposed action are those approved by management and are listed in the Programmatic EA and Appendix I to this document.

It is planned that the pipeline would run water for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife from about May 1 to October 30 each year, depending on water flow availability. The line would be shut down the remainder of the year, when cattle are not authorized to graze the area. The line may also be shut down if excess wild horse concentrations occur in the area.

There will be no effect to Historic Properties by this project. A Class III cultural resources inventory for the project area was done on July 9, 2002 (See report CRR-04-2003-1484P). Several prehistoric sites were located and recorded during this survey, but none were National Register eligible.

The BLM project inspector (PI) or a representative from the BLM would make periodic site visits to check on compliance of specifications and progress during pipeline construction.

Upon completion of the pipeline, a final inspection would be made to ensure compliance with specifications. Any deficiencies would be corrected at that time. Periodic compliance checks for maintenance would be made by the rangeland management specialist following pipeline completion in conjunction with routine rangeland monitoring of the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Allotments.

The vegetative resource would continue to be monitored in the long term using several rangeland

monitoring methods. Monitoring and data collection would continue in the form of establishing key areas, monitoring utilization levels, frequency trend, ecological condition, cover, observed apparent trend, actual use reports, and compliance checks. This data would be collected by the rangeland management specialist.

The disturbed area would also be monitored on a regular basis following construction for noxious or invasive weeds or nonnative species. Further mitigation measures for weeds are identified in the Noxious Weed Risk Assessment in Appendix II.

This project is not within the 40 acre allowable area specified by the State Water Engineer's Office. Therefore, before the proposed action is implemented, Duckwater Cattle Company would submit a new water rights application for a change in place of use for cattle grazing. BLM would submit a water rights application for wildlife and wild horses for the new places of use (new trough locations).

No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the water pipeline would not be built. Water would continue to be provided for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife at the existing Monte Cristo Well development. Water would continue to be hauled to a specific location in the Green Springs Use Area of the Duckwater Allotment. Progress would not be made in achieving healthy rangelands, good watershed condition, or other vegetative objectives.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Analysis

Hauling water over the long term for livestock distribution to the area of the proposed project was also considered as an alternative method for achieving project goals. Water hauling was eliminated from detailed analysis for the following reasons:

1. Adequate road access does not currently exist where water needs to be provided in the Monte Cristo Allotment for livestock distribution.

2. Creation of a water hauling road in the Monte Cristo Allotment would be potentially more damaging to the environment than the proposed action.

3. Long term water hauling would be a financial hardship for the grazing permittee.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Site specific descriptions of portions of the affected environment are included, as needed, in the Environmental Consequences section of this EA to facilitate understanding of anticipated impacts. The affected environment is described in Chapter 3 of the Egan RMP/FEIS. The Monte Cristo Allotment (0614) encompasses approximately 6,138 federal acres and 80 private acres for 6,218 total acres. The allotment is situated in the southeast portion of Newark Valley, south of Highway 50, in the western portion of the Ely District, approximately 50 air miles northwest of Ely, Nevada. The allotment is situated on the west side of Mt. Hamilton. The

general aspect of the allotment is a gradual westward slope into south Newark Valley. Elevations range from 6,300 feet at valley bottom to 7,000 feet on the western benches of Mt. Hamilton. Average annual precipitation is 8 – 10 inches. The allotment occurs entirely within the Newark Watershed #121. The allotment also occurs within the Central Nevada Basin and Range (028B) Major Land Resource Area (MLRA).

The Green Springs Use Area of the Duckwater Allotment (0701) encompasses approximately 35,000 federal acres and 680 private acres for 35,680 total acres. The use area is situated just south of the Monte Cristo Allotment, in the far north of Railroad Valley. The aspect, topography, elevations, and precipitation are similar to those of the Monte Cristo Allotment. The Green Springs Use Area occurs within the Duckwater Watershed #154 and the Central Nevada Basin and Range (028B) Major Land Resource Area (MLRA).

Wild Horses and Burros

The Monte Cristo Allotment was evaluated and a final multiple use decision (FMUD) was issued in July, 1995. The entire allotment lies within the Monte Cristo Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA). The appropriate management level (AML) for the allotment is 7 wild horses year-long (85 AUMs). The AML for the entire Monte Cristo Herd Area is 236 wild horses year-long. The Duckwater Allotment was evaluated and a full force and effect FMUD was issued in June, 1995. The AML for the Green Springs Use Area is also 7 wild horses year-long (86 AUMs). Recent census data indicate that 7 or fewer wild horses have been using the Monte Cristo Allotment year-long, however, up to 100 wild horses have been using the Green Springs Use Area during the winter period.

Vegetation

The three main vegetation types within both allotments are salt desert shrub, northern desert shrub (big sagebrush types) and pinyon – juniper woodlands. The main vegetation type within the project area is a Wyoming big sagebrush/needlegrass range site (Range site 028B086NV). A second type that covers a large acreage is a black sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass/Indian ricegrass range site (Range Site 028BY006NV). Utah juniper and single-leaf pinyon trees are common in the area.

Soils

The soils in the pipeline area are predominantly gravelly loams. The soils are gently sloping fan piedmont types going to 60” deep. The potential for wind and water erosion is slight.

Wilderness Values

The Monte Cristo Allotment and Green Springs Use Area of the Duckwater Allotment do not occur within wilderness or a wilderness study area (WSA). The nearest WSA is the Park Range WSA which is approximately 25 miles to the southwest of the proposed water pipeline development.

Special Status Species (Federally listed, proposed or candidate Threatened or Endangered Species, and State sensitive species)

There is one documented sage grouse strutting ground (lek) on the Monte Cristo Allotment. There is one sage grouse wintering area. These areas are from one to two miles west of the proposed pipeline route. The pipeline would not pass through these areas. Ferruginous hawk nest sites are located in the northwest portion of the Monte Cristo Allotment. The pipeline would not pass through this area.

Wildlife

Mule deer, elk, and chukar partridge use the Monte Cristo Allotment and Green Springs Use Area seasonally. Mule deer use these areas during both fall and spring migrations. Mule deer winter use has been observed in the eastern portions of the area, especially where browse is available in the eastern portion of the Monte Cristo Allotment. Elk use of the area is limited. Some elk winter use has been observed in the eastern portions of the Green Springs Use Area. Chukar partridge are residents of the Green Springs Use Area. Antelope make very little use on the Monte Cristo Allotment, however, they use the Green Springs Use Area year-long. Bald eagles, golden eagles, and peregrine falcons may be observed in either area at varying times of the year.

Recreation

Recreation in this area includes large and small game hunting, wildlife observation, wild horse observation, hiking, and occasional off road vehicle exploration.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive, Non-Native Species

The Ely weeds inventory indicates that small patches of the noxious species whitetop and Russian knapweed are present on the main county road approximately one mile west of the project area. The invasive non-native grass cheatgrass has been identified in sagebrush range, primarily in the south of the project area. The invasive species Russian thistle also occurs in small scattered populations in the project area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following resources do not occur and would not be impacted by the construction of the proposed water pipeline.

1) Floodplains, Wetlands, and Riparian Areas.

2) Wilderness Values, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

3) Prime or Unique Farmlands.

The environmental consequences of the following resources have been considered.

4) Native American Religious Concerns.

A Tribal coordination meeting was held at the Ely BLM Field Office on May 31, 2001. No concerns were expressed by Native Americans at this meeting in regard to the proposed action.

5) Environmental Justice.

No disparate impacts would occur to low income or minority peoples.

6) Paleontological and Historic Resource Values.

No paleontological or historic resource values were discovered during field survey.

7) Hazardous Wastes.

Hazardous wastes do not exist on the project site nor would they be introduced by the proposed action.

8) Migratory Birds.

Impacts to migratory birds would not occur because of mitigation built into the proposed action.

9) Water Quality (Drinking/Ground).

Sources of drinking water do not occur within the impact area of the proposed action. The ground water, located in a deep aquifer, would not be impacted by the proposed action.

Anticipated Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Range

Specific impacts would include better control of cattle movements resulting in improved cattle distribution and utilization of key forage species in each of the two allotments. Improvement in cattle distribution and utilization would result in enhanced forage production, ground cover, vigor, species composition, diversity, range condition and trend, and watershed conditions. Areas of overutilization, such as in white sage bottoms or around the existing troughs near the water well, would be reduced, due to improved livestock distribution and no increase in cattle numbers. Water and forage availability would increase for livestock. Progress would be made in achieving Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration.

2. Soils

Short term impacts to soils (impacts for the first year following pipeline construction) from pipeline installation activities should be minimal. A minor increase in soil compaction and

disturbance to soil structure would result due to vehicle and equipment activity during construction. Minor soil loss could occur as a result of wind and water erosion. A one to two foot wide strip of soil to a depth of one to three feet would be disturbed to bury the pipeline. In the long-term (after the first year following pipeline construction) it is expected that soil characteristics would benefit from the improved livestock distribution resulting from the new water development. Increased forage production and an improved ground cover would result in less soil erosion and better soil/water relations. A new disturbed area of soil of approximately ½ acre would develop around the new trough locations. Impacts to soils outside the ½ acre area are expected to be minimal, especially during the fall/winter grazing period.

3. Vegetation

In the short-term, some vegetation would be crushed or trampled during pipeline construction. It is estimated approximately 100 pinyon or juniper trees would have to be cut to provide clearance for the pipeline. Trees would be dragged away from the pipeline corridor to provide wood for wood cutters. In the long-term, following one year after pipeline construction, vegetation along the pipeline corridor would begin to return to a composition similar to what existed prior to pipeline construction. The pipeline is expected to lead to vegetation impacts such as improved vigor, increased cover, increased production and forage availability, and an improved rangeland condition and trend. Native plants would be allowed to complete a growth cycle. A new disturbed area of vegetation of approximately ½ acre would develop around the new trough locations. Impacts to vegetation outside the ½ acre area of disturbance are expected to be minimal.

4. Wildlife

In the short-term, during construction of the pipeline, resident wildlife attendant to the pipeline corridor, including birds, small mammals, rodents, and reptiles would be temporarily disturbed and displaced by pipeline construction activity. In the long-term, after pipeline construction, wildlife habitat would be enhanced and expanded by improved ground cover and a better quantity and availability of forage resulting from better livestock distribution. Water availability would increase for wildlife. The small ponds at each trough site would benefit wildlife. Because water would not be piped year-round, some stress may result to localized wildlife populations when the water is shut off. Some wildlife drownings could occur even though wildlife escape ramps would be placed in the troughs.

5. Special Status Species (Federally listed, proposed or candidate Threatened or Endangered Species, and State sensitive species)

No sage grouse leks are located on or near the proposed pipeline development, thus sage grouse would not be affected by the proposed action or the resulting grazing use. With improved livestock distribution, lighter grazing pressure in other areas of the allotment could benefit sage grouse by increasing vegetative production and cover. No special status plants are located on or near the proposed pipeline, thus special status plants would not be affected by the proposal.

6. Cultural Resources

There would be no impacts to any Historic Properties or paleontological resources by this project. Several small, very diffuse lithic scatters occur along the pipeline route. Avoidance may not be possible.

7. Recreation

Both during and following pipeline construction, there would be minimal impacts to existing recreational activities. To the extent that wildlife populations are increased, wildlife-related recreation such as hunting, wildlife viewing, antler collection, and photography would be enhanced. The pipeline corridor is not expected to lead to increased off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in the area.

8. Visual Resource Management (VRM)

The pipeline corridor would introduce visual contrasts into the landscape. Shrubs, grasses, and forbs would be trampled during pipeline installation; however, in the long-term, following one year after pipeline construction, vegetation is expected to return to a composition and structure similar to what existed prior to pipeline construction. The pipeline and water troughs would not be visible from the county road that is from one to two miles west of the proposed pipeline. Vegetative and topographic screening would hide any contrasts. The proposed project is consistent with the Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class IV objectives for this area. According to BLM Manual H-8410-1, the VRM Class IV Objectives are as follows:

"The objective of this class is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements." {Form, line, color, and texture}.

9. Air Quality

A short term, minor, and local impact to air quality could result due to ground disturbance by vehicles and construction activities. There would be dust associated with livestock use around the troughs. Impacts would be temporary and would dissipate quickly.

10. Solid Wastes

A limited amount of solid waste would be generated by the construction of this project. The waste would be disposed of properly.

11. Social and Economic Values

Lifestyles of local residents would not be impacted. The proposed range improvement would provide economic benefits for the livestock permittee in this area by improving the efficiency of their overall operation. The proposed pipeline would facilitate livestock management. Installation of projects which serve the public interest could improve the relationship between the local public and the BLM.

12. Noxious Weeds and Invasive, Non-Native Species

Pipeline building activity and the resulting grazing use would not result in an increase in noxious weeds to the area impacted by pipeline construction. The Risk Factor for spread of noxious weeds is low at the present time (See Appendix II for the Noxious Weed Risk Assessment). However, pipeline building activity and the resulting grazing use could result in an increase in invasive or non-native species in the immediate project area. Both inside and outside of the immediate project area, grazing use may or may not cause an increase in invasive plants, depending on climate, stocking level, timing of grazing, presence or absence of fire, and other factors.

Heavy equipment used in construction activity would be washed prior to working in the area. The disturbed area would be monitored on a regular basis for noxious or invasive weeds or nonnative species. Control treatments would be initiated on noxious weed populations that become established in the project area.

13. Wild Horses and Burros

Implementing the proposed action would have minimal impacts upon wild horses in the Monte Cristo HMA. Wild horses should benefit directly from additional water sources. They would also benefit from an improved forage resource. Because water would not be provided year-long at the troughs, some wild horses could become stressed when the water is shut off. Additional natural waters are nearby, to provide year-long water. The pipeline would not be a barrier to normal wild horse movements.

14. Water Quantity

Implementing the proposed action would increase water availability for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife to the amount provided by one or two 550 gallon powder river troughs and associated small ponds during the period May 1 to October 31 each year, depending upon the proper water flow from the well. Depending on water flow, the small overflow ponds would also provide water during the same time period.

15. Cumulative Impacts

According to the 1994 BLM Handbook “Guidelines for Assessing and Documenting Cumulative Impacts,” the analysis can be focused on those issues and resource values identified during scoping that are of major importance. No issues or resource values of

major importance were identified during the EA scoping period, thus no specific resource value is addressed below. A general discussion of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions follows:

Past Actions

There have been limited previous actions occurring in the project area. Historical mineral mining has been common in the project area, which is located approximately three miles south of Mt. Hamilton. There has been no historical oil or gas production or exploration in the area. Woodcutting and pinyon nut gathering have been minimal. Hunting, wildlife viewing, and other recreational activities including OHV use have been minimal. Small two track roads associated with these activities are not extensive and have not altered the landscape. Wildfires have not been frequent or catastrophic. Wild horse and wildlife use have not been intensive in the area and have not fundamentally altered the plant communities. Wild horse gathers have occurred regularly in this area. The last wild horse gather occurred in December, 2002. Livestock grazing has been intensive historically and may be a contributing factor to the presence of invasive plant species. Livestock grazing has been modified twice in recent years, by grazing agreements dated April 1996 and August 1999. There has been a relative lack of range improvements to distribute cattle use and improve forage utilization and rangeland health. The Monte Cristo Fence, an open ended allotment boundary fence of approximately three miles in length, was constructed in the area in 2001. Rangeland monitoring has been a common activity in the area.

Present Actions

Current activities or projects occurring in the project area are very limited. There is no current mineral mining or oil and gas exploration. The Mt. Hamilton Mine to the north is currently being reclaimed. Woodcutting and pinyon nut gathering are minimal. Recreational activities including OHV use are currently minimal. There is only occasional use of the small two track roads in the area. There have been no recent wildfires. Current livestock grazing, wild horse use, and wildlife use are not intensive in the area. Duckwater Cattle Company has generally grazed at less than permitted use in the area for the past few grazing years. Duckwater Cattle Company has taken total voluntary non-use on the the Monte Cristo Allotment for two recent years. Duckwater Cattle Company's grazing permit has recently been renewed, without ant changes, for the ten year period June 2005 to June 2015. A wild horse gather is planned for January, 2006. The project area continues to be monitored to determine if grazing management practices are meeting the vegetative objectives for the allotment. Implementing the proposed action would contribute to achieving the Northeast Great Basin Area Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration and Healthy Rangelands.

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

No other range improvements are planned for the project area in the near future. BLM and Duckwater Cattle Company are working on finalizing a new grazing agreement

which would change the season of grazing use in the Green Springs Use Area. Future wild horse gathers would continue to occur within the wild horse herd area. There are no anticipated increases in mining, woodcutting, pinyon nut gathering, or OHV use in the area in the reasonably foreseeable future. A slight increase in hunting and wildlife viewing could occur due to increased water availability. Rangeland monitoring is expected to continue in about the same manner and scope as it has in the past.

A new resource management plan and environmental impact statement (RMP/EIS) is currently being developed for the Ely Field Office BLM area. The draft RMP/EIS is currently out for public review and comment. According to the new RMP/EIS, resource management would occur on a watershed basis. The area of the proposed action occurs within the Newark and Duckwater Watersheds.

Cumulative Impacts

Past and present actions have resulted in less than desirable range and watershed conditions. The proposed action, in association with the Monte Cristo Fence, would improve rangeland health and watershed conditions. By improving livestock distribution, the white sage bottoms that have traditionally been over utilized, would recover. There would be little cumulative visual impairment to the area as a result of the pipeline project. The proposed action would improve grazing management. No cumulative impacts of major concern are anticipated as a result of the proposed project.

Anticipated Impacts of the No Action Alternative

According to the No Action Alternative, the water pipeline development would not be constructed, and impacts as described above would not occur. Livestock distribution and forage utilization would not improve. Areas of overutilization would not be reduced. Water and forage availability would not increase for livestock, wild horses, or wildlife. Wildlife habitat would not be enhanced. There would be no economic benefit to the grazing permittee. Vegetative composition, production, cover, and vigor would not improve. There would be no impact to soils, special status species, recreation, visual resources, air quality, or invasive, non-native species (including noxious weeds) from the no action alternative.

V. PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES

Appropriate mitigation measures have been included in the proposed action (Section II). No additional mitigation measures are proposed as a result of the analysis of the potential impacts.

VI. SUGGESTED MONITORING

Appropriate monitoring has been included as part of the proposed action (Section II). No additional monitoring is suggested as a result of the analysis of potential impacts.

VII. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Public Interest and Record of Contacts

There is a general public interest in the proper management of public lands. Duckwater Cattle Company has a strong interest in this project.

A summary of the proposed action was originally posted on the Ely BLM website on March 25, 2003. Public input following the original posting prompted BLM to review and improve the public participation process and decision making process for range improvement EAs. As a result, the original EA has been reviewed and revised. Normally, a draft EA would be posted for a thirty day public review and comment period on the Ely BLM external website. However, the BLM external website is currently unavailable to the public. Thus, a hard copy of the draft EA will be mailed, for a thirty day public comment and review period, to those interested publics who have expressed an interest in range management actions on the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Grazing Allotments. Changes in the EA based upon public input will be made as appropriate.

Interested publics will again be notified by mail when the EA is completed and the Decision Record/Finding of No Significant Impact (DR/FONSI) is signed. These documents will also be mailed to interested publics. The signed DR/FONSI initiates a 15 day protest period and a 30 day appeal period.

The Ely Field Office mails an annual Consultation, Cooperation, and Coordination (CCC) Letter to individuals and organizations that have expressed an interest in rangeland management related actions. Those receiving the annual CCC Letter have the opportunity to request from the Field Office more information regarding specific actions. Those requesting notification of range improvement actions are requested to respond if they want to receive a copy of the final EA and signed Decision Record/Finding of No Significant Impact. The following individuals and organizations, who were sent the annual CCC letter in January, 2005, have requested additional information regarding range developments or range improvement programs within the Monte Cristo or Duckwater Grazing Allotments:

Jim Baumann
Curtis A. Baughman, Nevada Division of Wildlife
Randy Buffington
Steven J. Carter, Carter Cattle Co.
Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife
Ken Conley
Eureka County Natural Resource Department
Fish Creek Cattle Company
Katie Fite, Western Watersheds Project
Steve Foree, Nevada Division of Wildlife
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Brad Hardenbrook, Nevada Division of Wildlife
Jerry E. McGuire

Betsy Macfarlan, Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition
Nevada State Clearinghouse
Russell W. Peacock
PLUAC c/o Virginia Lani
Carl Slagowski
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
White River Ranch
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Record of Personal Consultation and Coordination

Alan & Edna Forsgren (Duckwater Cattle Company)
Nevada Division of Wildlife
Duckwater Shoshone Tribe

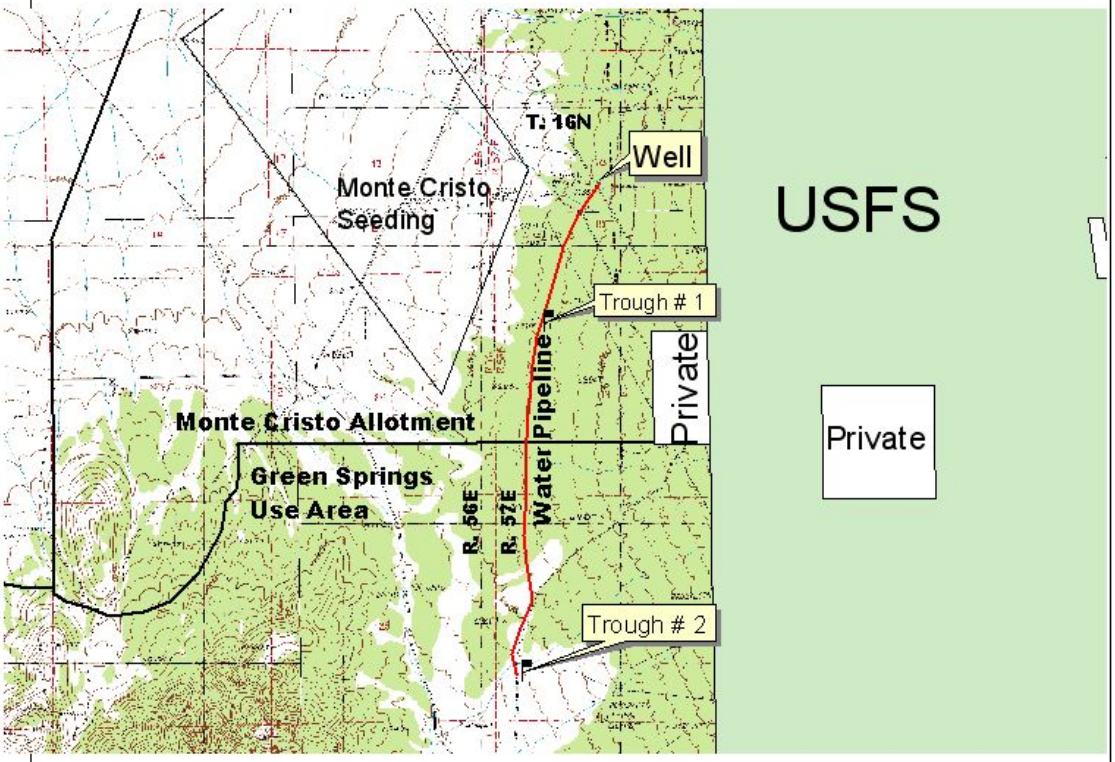
On May 31, 2001, the Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development proposal was presented to a Tribal coordination meeting at the Ely BLM Field Office. No concerns were identified during this meeting. There were no questions or comments regarding the proposal from the Tribal participants.

Internal District Review

Chris Mayer,	Range, Environmental Coordination
Mark Lowrie,	Range, Environmental Coordination, Environmental Assessment & Weed Risk Assessment
Brad Pendley,	Threatened and Endangered Animals, Plants, Wildlife, Migratory Birds, Riparian
Carolyn S. Bybee,	Environmental Coordination, External Outreach, Archaeology
Jared Bybee,	Wild Horses
Fred Fisher,	Operations
Larry Martin,	Engineering
Harry Rhea,	Operations & Weed Management
Elvis Wall,	Native American Coordination
Dave Anderson,	Recreation, Visual Resources

Monte Cristo Water Pipeline

Ely Field Office
Bureau of Land Management



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Scale 1:40,000

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No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.

December 2, 2005
M.L.

Appendix I
Standard Operating Procedures

A complete listing of the standard operating procedures (SOP's) is provided in the Programmatic EA. The following SOP's that apply to the proposed action should be adhered to for the pipeline project:

1. Removal of vegetation will be held to the minimum necessary for construction, access, and to provide for safety.

2. Construction activities will be limited to times when soils are not wet or saturated, to lessen soil compaction by equipment. In addition, construction activities may be delayed by the authorized officer due to severely dry conditions, to prevent unnecessary erosion of soil resources.

3. Vehicle travel shall only be permitted along the proposed pipeline corridor during the construction phase. Access will be via existing roads and trails whenever possible. Where existing roads are not available, off road travel will be kept to the minimum necessary for construction.

4. If the need to use, store, and/or dispose of hazardous materials arises, which is not identified in this EA, the authorized person(s) constructing the project would notify and seek authorization from the BLM.

5. Maintenance of the pipeline project will be accomplished by the operator(s) through cooperative agreements with the BLM, or through range improvement permits.

6. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(G) the holder of this authorization must notify the authorized officer by telephone, with written confirmation immediately upon discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony (as defined at 43 CFR 10.2). Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4 (c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

7. All equipment and assorted materials associated with the construction of the project must be removed within 30 days after completion of the project. Project area cleanup will be accomplished by removing all refuse to an approved sanitary landfill.

8. The "no activity" period for all management actions in migratory bird habitat is from 5-1 to 7/15 unless a survey is done to determine no migratory bird breeding or nesting is occurring in the area.

For any activity scheduled between 5/1 and 7/15 the following must take place:

Area which is going to be disturbed must be clearly identified on appropriate maps.

The wildlife team will conduct breeding bird surveys to identify if migratory bird breeding or nesting is occurring in the area.

9. For sage grouse wintering grounds, disturbance should be avoided from November 1 to March 31.

APPENDIX II
NOXIOUS WEED RISK ASSESSMENT

On November 4, 2000 a Noxious Weed Risk Assessment was completed by Mark Lowrie, rangeland management specialist, for the Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development, located in White Pine County, Nevada. The legal location for the pipeline is:

T. 16N., R. 57E., Sections 18, 19, and 30. This project will disturb approximately 2 acres of public lands.

Factor 1 assesses the likelihood of noxious weed species spreading to the project area.

For this project, the factor rates as (low,2) at the present time. This means that noxious weeds were located adjacent to, but not within, the project area. The weeds specialist for the Ely District inventoried the proposed pipeline route and two track roads near the project area in November of 2000. No noxious weeds were observed in the project area and no concerns about weeds were recorded. The pipeline was again surveyed for noxious weeds during the cultural resources inventory and no weeds were recorded.

Factor 2 assesses the consequences of noxious weed establishment in the project area.

For this project, the factor rates as (low,3) at the present time. This means that there is very little likelihood that noxious weeds will spread to the area disturbed by the proposed pipeline. No cumulative effects of noxious weeds spreading to the native plant community are expected.

The Risk Rating is obtained by multiplying Factor 1 by Factor 2.

For this project, the Risk Rating is (low,6) at the present time. This means that the project can proceed as planned. Any heavy equipment used in pipeline construction activities would be washed prior to entering the project area. Control treatments would be initiated on noxious weed populations that get established in the project area. The pipeline should be monitored the first year following construction for noxious weeds. It is possible noxious weed seed could be imported to the area via livestock, wildlife, people, vehicles, or other modes of transport.

Reviewed by: _____ Date:

DECISION RECORD
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
(DR/FONSI)
MONTE CRISTO WATER PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT
NV-040-02-032

Decision: I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Monte Cristo Water Pipeline Development and concur with the analysis of environmental impacts. It is my decision to authorize this improvement as described in the proposed action portion of the EA. The site-specific analysis for the proposed action is technically adequate and addresses the critical elements of the human environment. The project will be constructed under applicable Standard Operating Procedures. Appropriate mitigating measures will be implemented as follows:

1. Water pipeline construction will comply with the requirements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. For the protection of migratory birds, no construction activities will occur during the period of May 1 through July 15 unless a breeding bird survey is completed first.

2. Control treatments will be initiated if noxious or invasive weeds are detected during rangeland monitoring of the area.

3. The project will be monitored during construction for compliance with pipeline construction guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures. Other monitoring includes compliance checks regularly to ensure the project is properly maintained for the health and safety of the public as well as for wildlife and livestock.

4. The project area will be monitored following pipeline completion to determine the effectiveness of the water development in distributing livestock use, and to determine what effect the project will have on rangeland health and native vegetative condition.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) NV-040-02-032, dated November 10, 2005. After consideration of the environmental impacts as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed water pipeline development, with the project design and standard operating procedures as described in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Rationale:

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Egan Resource Management Plan, the White Pine County Land Use Plan, and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal, and federal agencies and governments. This proposed project would be effective in restoring rangeland health and watershed condition on public lands in the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Allotments. Approval of the proposed action would assist the Bureau and rancher in improving or maintaining rangeland health, watershed condition, and in meeting the multiple use management objectives established for the Monte

Cristo and Duckwater Allotments. Through improved livestock distribution, progression will be made towards achievement of Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration.

Context:

The proposed project is located within the Newark and Duckwater Watersheds of the Ely District BLM. The project would occur within the Monte Cristo and Duckwater Grazing Allotments, in the sagebrush or pinyon/juniper range in south Newark Valley. The project area is located about 50 miles west of Ely, Nevada. The project would disturb a total of approximately two acres.

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The environmental assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the water pipeline development. This project would improve overall watershed condition and rangeland health by distributing livestock, wild horse, and wildlife use. It would improve the grazing management for the permittee. Adverse effects would include the temporary loss of approximately 2 acres of sagebrush or pinyon/juniper rangelands for cattle, wild horses, or wildlife.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The proposed action will not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no unique cultural or environmental characteristics in the geographic area. The project area has been completely surveyed for cultural resources. Significant cultural resources will either be avoided or mitigated. The project area does not contain any park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Presently there is little controversy on the effects of the project on the quality of the human environment.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

There are no known effects of the proposed project identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The water pipeline and associated troughs would be constructed to standard practices and standard operating procedures.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA. No other resource actions are currently planned for this area other than the scheduled January 2006 wild horse gather.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

No districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places were identified in the project area and EA. The proposed action will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

No endangered or threatened species or their habitats are present in the project area.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

_____ _____

William Dunn Date
Acting Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources